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A SERMON

Preached before the

KING,

UPON THE

Nineteenth of *March*, 167$\frac{0}{1}$.

BY J. P. Wilkins.

JOHN Lord Bishop of CHESTER.

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ECCLES. 12. 14.

For God ſhall bring every work into judgment, with every ſecret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

THis Book doth contain a Philoſophical Diſquiſition concerning a ſtate of *Happineſs*; wherein the Wiſe man doth particularly diſcuſs each of thoſe Subjects, which according to the various opini-

ons and tempers of men, are believed to have any pretence to it.

The precedent Verſe (as I have formerly ſhewed) doth contain *the Concluſion of the whole matter*; The chief inference and reſult from all the former Debates and Enquiries; wherein he aſſerts, That every man's true happineſs doth conſiſt in being religious, In *fearing God*, and *keeping his Commandments*.

And though this Concluſion had been ſufficiently proved by great variety of Arguments, in the foregoing Diſcourſe; yet he thinks fit here in the cloſe of all, to back and enforce it with one Argument more; which above all others is moſt apt to make deep impreſſion upon the minds of men; and (if any thing can) to perſwade them to the Duties of Religion: And that is the conſideration of the laſt

laſt Judgment, in the words of the Text, *For God ſhall bring*, &c.

That which I intend from theſe words, is to prove, againſt the Infidels and Scoffers of this Age, The Reaſonableneſs and the Credibility of this great Principle of Religion, concerning a future ſtate of *Reward* and *Puniſhment*.

Though the Principal Evidence for this do depend upon Scripture, eſpecially the New Teſtament, where it is ſaid, That *life and immortality is brought to light by the Goſpel*. Yet in a point of ſo great moment and conſequence as this is, it is not to be imagined, that God ſhould have *left himſelf without a witneſs* to all the Nations of the World, but that all men ſhould be endowed, with ſuch natural Capacities and Notions, as being improved by Conſideration, will afford ſufficient 2 Tim. 1. 10.

evi-

evidence for the belief of this great Fundamental Principle.

As for ſuch men, who live under the ſenſe of Guilt, whoſe Intereſt it is that there ſhould be no future account, It cannot be otherwiſe expected from ſuch, But that they ſhould be willing to diſ-believe this. And from hence it is, that ſome of the Ancient *Philoſophers* have employed their Learning and Subtilty, to diſpute themſelves into ſome kind of doubts and uncertainty about it. And yet the generality even of theſe have been forced to acknowledg it much more probable than the contrary. And as for the *Vulgar* ſort of people, who are guided by the more ſimple dictates of Nature, Theſe have in all *Ages* and *Nations* ſubmitted themſelves to this Doctrine, and profeſſed a firm belief of it. And though *Vulgar Opi-*

nion be but a very bad Topick about ſuch matters as may gratifie men in their eaſe and ſenſual appetites; yet in ſuch other Opinions as are croſs to their Worldly Intereſts, it may argue ſuch things to be from ſome natural impreſſion upon their minds, which they muſt believe, and cannot otherwiſe chuſe.

The Arguments I would make uſe of to this purpoſe, may be reduced to theſe three general Heads:

1. From the *ſuitableneſs* of this Principle, to *the moſt natural Notions of our Minds.*

2. The *Neceſſity* of it, to *the government of mens Lives and Actions in this World.*

3. The *Neceſſity* of it, for *the vindication of Divine Providence.*

1. I begin with the first: The *suitableness* of it *to the most natural Notions of our Minds*, and those kind of Impressions which belong to us, as we are Reasonable Creatures. We see by experience, that all other things (so far as we are able to judg) *Minerals*, *Plants*, *Beasts*, &c. are naturally endowed with such Principles, as are most fit to promote the perfection of their natures in their several Kinds. And therefore it is by no means credible, that *Mankind* only, the most excellent of all the other Creatures in this visible World, for the service of whom, so many other things seem to be designed, should have such kind of Principles interwoven in his very Nature, as do contain in them meer cheats and delusions. And therefore whatsoever those things are, which the generality of Mankind, especially the most

moſt *wiſe* and the moſt *conſiderate* part of them, do agree in, ought to be allowed for highly credible; otherwiſe it muſt follow, that we are framed with ſuch kind of Faculties, as in our moſt cautious exerciſe of them, are more likely to *ſeduce* us, and expoſe us to Error, than to *direct* and lead us to the Truth.

But I ſhall endeavour to manifeſt this more particularly, by theſe three Conſiderations.

1. This Principle is moſt ſuitable to the general *Apprehenſions of Mankind*, concerning the nature of *Good* and *Evil*.

2. To thoſe *natural Hopes* and Expectations which the generality of *good men* have, concerning a ſtate of future *Happineſs*.

3. To thoſe *natural Fears* and Expectations, which the generality of

wicked men are poſſeſſed with, concerning a *future ſtate of Puniſhment* and *Miſery*.

1. This Principle is moſt ſuitable to the *general Apprehenſions of Mankind* concerning the nature of *Good* and *Evil*. All men heretofore have agreed, that there is ſuch a Thing as the *Law of Nature*, whereby things are diſtinguiſhed into *Good* and *Bad*; according to which, the Actions of men are determined to be either *Virtuous* or *Vicious*. And as the one of theſe, doth in the eſſence of it imply *Comelineſs* and *Reward*; ſo doth the other denote *Turpitude* and *Puniſhment*. Theſe things being implied in the very definitions of *Virtue* and *Vice*. And from hence it will follow, That as there is ſome Superior Power who hath put this Law into our Natures; ſo will he take care to enforce the obſervance

servance of it, by rewarding and punishing men accordingly. This being implied in the nature of a Law.

If there be nothing in the naked essence of things that makes them to differ, but what doth meerly arise from *Custom* and *Positive Laws*; why then Custom and Law would be able to render it a very virtuous and commendable thing for a man to be *ingrateful*, a *breaker of Compacts*, a *false Witness*, a *Perjured person*; which is so monstrous a Position, that the common Reason of Mankind will abhor it upon the first proposal. Nothing is more obvious, than that there is a universal desire amongst men, of seeming honest: The most impudent and profligate Wretch being loth to be esteemed to be, what really he is. The very Sin of Hypocrisie, so general amongst men, doth give a large

Testimony

Teſtimony to the *Beauty of Goodneſs*, and the *Deformity of Vice*. Nor is there any account to be given, why there ſhould be impreſſed upon the nature of men ſuch a value for the one, and diſlike for the other, if there were not in the things themſelves, ſomething ſuitable to thoſe contrary affections.

We ſee by experience, that there is ſuch a kind of Reſt and Acquieſcence in the mind, upon the *diſcovery of Truth*, and the *doing of Virtuous Actions*, as belong to natural Bodies, when they are in their proper places: Which may argue theſe things to have ſome peculiar ſuitableneſs to the Soul of man, and that the oppoſites to them do offer violence to ſome natural Principle belonging to it.

2. This Principle is moſt ſuitable to thoſe natural *Hopes* and *Expectati-*

ons which the generality of *good men* have concerning a ſtate of *future Happineſs*. From whence doth ariſe that Confidence and Courage, whereby thoſe of meaneſt Quality and Abilities (if otherwiſe Virtuous perſons) can ſupport themſelves in their ſufferings for that which is good: Which doth neceſſarily ſuppoſe in them a ſtrong, and even a natural belief and perſwaſion of ſuch a future ſtate, wherein their ſufferings ſhall be conſidered and rewarded.

Beſides that, there is a natural deſire in all men, after a ſtate of *Happineſs* and *Perfection*. And if we conſider the utter impoſſibility of attaining to any ſuch condition in this life, This will render it highly credible, That there muſt be another ſtate wherein this Happineſs is attainable: otherwiſe Mankind muſt fail of his chief End,

End, being by a natural Principle moſt ſtrongly inclined to ſuch a ſtate of Happineſs as he can never attain to. As if he were purpoſely framed to be tormented betwixt theſe two Paſſions, *Deſire*, and *Deſpair*; an earneſt Propenſion after Happineſs, and an utter incapacity of ever enjoying it. And, which is yet more conſiderable, The *better* and the *wiſer* any man is, the more earneſt deſires and hopes hath he after ſuch a ſtate of Happineſs. And if there be no ſuch thing, Not only *Nature*, but *Virtue* likewiſe muſt contribute to make men miſerable; Than which, nothing can ſeem more unreaſonable to thoſe who believe a Juſt and a Wiſe Providence.

3. This Principle is moſt ſuitable to thoſe *Fears* and *Expectations* which the generality of *wicked men* are poſſeſſed with, concerning a *future ſtate*

of

of Misery. Witness those natural suggestions of Conscience in the worst of men, that upon any wicked action (though never so private) are oftentimes startling of them, with the apprehensions of another Judicature and Tribunal, before which they shall be called to an account for their Closest sins. All that secret regret, and those inward smitings, *Laniatus & Ictus*, which are so often felt in the Minds of men, upon the commission of any great sin, do argue some common intimations, even in the Light of Nature, of another Judgment after this life, wherein they shall be accountable for such Actions, which men do not punish or take notice of.

And these natural Fears do usually seize upon all kind of men promiscuously, even those who are most *Potent*, who by their own Wills can give Laws

to Nations, and command mighty Armies, yet cannot they avoid these Checks and Lashes of Conscience, but that they will seize upon them, and shake them, as well as the poorest meanest Subject. Nor can such as are most *obstinately wicked*, who with their utmost study and endeavour, apply themselves to the suppressing and disbelief of these Notions, so wholly stifle them, but that they will be continually rising up in their Minds, and pursuing of them.

Now as there is no man whatsoever, that is wholly freed from these fears of future misery after death, so there is no other Creature but Man, that hath any fears of this kind. And if there be no real ground for this, then must it follow, That he who framed all his other Works with such an excellent congruity, did yet so contrive the

the Nature of Man, the moſt noble amongſt them, as to prove a needleſs torment and burden to it ſelf.

If it be ſaid, That theſe *Notions* may proceed from ſuch Principles as men have derived from *Inſtitution*, and the Teaching of others, and do not imply a Neceſſity of any ſuch *Natural impreſſions*.

To this it may be anſwered, That it is ſufficient to denominate them *Natural Notions*, if they have ſuch a *ſuitableneſs* to the Minds of men, as makes them to be generally owned by all thoſe who apply their thoughts to the conſideration of them. And that they have ſuch a natural ſuitableneſs, may appear, Becauſe Inſtitution cannot ſo eaſily *eradicate* theſe notions, as it can *fix* them. Now if the meer teaching of others were it ſelf ſufficient to *impreſs* theſe Notions, without any ſuch

peculiar congruity in the things themſelves, It would be as ſufficient to *deface* them again: Eſpecially conſidering the advantage on this ſide, from that natural repugnancy we have, againſt any thing which brings diſquiet to our Minds. And nothing is more troubleſome in this kind, than the Fear which follows upon Guilt.

But now, though there have been ſeveral men, of no mean Abilities, in ſeveral Ages, who have made it their buſineſs to root out of the Minds of men all ſuch troubleſome notions about a future ſtate, endeavouring to perſwade themſelves and others, That as there was a time before they were born into the world, when they were not; So at their dying, or going out of it, they ſhall exiſt no more. And yet, though it be their intereſt to believe this, though they make it their ſtudy

and

and buſineſs to perſwade themſelves and others to it; It may reaſonably be doubted, whether ever yet, there hath been ſo much as one perſon that hath hereby become abſolutely free from theſe Fears: But for the moſt part, Thoſe who would have them eſteemed vain and imaginary, without any foundation in Nature, Theſe are the perſons who are moſt aſſaulted with them.

Hi ſunt qui trepidant & ad omnia fulgura pallent. So powerful and *unconquerable* are theſe impreſſions, and therefore *natural.*

2. The ſecond Reaſon I propoſed to ſpeak to, was from *the Neceſſity of this Principle, to the right government of mens Lives and Actions in this world,* and the preſerving of Society amongſt them.

Nothing can be more evident, than that the Human Nature is ſo framed,

as

as not to be regulated and kept within due bounds, without *Laws*; and Laws muſt be inſignificant, without the Sanctions of *Rewards* and *Puniſhments*, whereby men may be neceſſitated to the obſervance of them. Now the temporal Rewards and Puniſhments of this life, cannot be ſufficient to this end; and therefore there is a neceſſity, that there ſhould be another future ſtate of Happineſs and Miſery.

All the Rewards and Puniſhments of this life, are to be expected either from the *Civil Magiſtrate*, who by virtue of his Place and Calling is obliged to the duty of diſtributive Juſtice: Or elſe from *Divine Providence*, according to that moſt uſual courſe which we find by experience to be obſerved by Him, in his diſpenſation of theſe Temporal things. Now neither of theſe can afford ſufficient Motives for

for the government of Mens Lives and Actions.

1. Not all that may be expected from the *Civil Magistrate*, Because there may be many good and evil Actions, which they cannot take notice of; And they can reward and punish only such things as come under their cognizance. And if this were the only restraint upon men, it could be no hindrance from any such Mischief or Villanies which men had the opportunity of committing secretly. Nor would it extend to those who had Power and Strength enough to defend themselves from the Law, and escape the penalty of it; but that such might without any kind of check or fear, follow the inclinations of their own Appetites. Nor would it afford any remedy in the case of such wicked Magistrates as should invert the order of their Institution;

tution, proving *Terrors to well-doers*, and *Encouragers to those that do ill*.

2. Not all that may be expected from *Common Providence*: For though it should be granted, that according to the most usual and general course of things, both Virtuous and Vicious Actions are rewarded and punished in this life; yet there may be many particular cases which this Motive would not reach unto; namely all such cases where a man's Reason shall inform him, that there is far greater probability of safety and advantage, by committing a sin, than can be reasonably expected, (according to his experience of the usual course of things in the world,) by doing his duty. Suppose the case of the three Children, or of any others called to Martyrdom, who may be threatned with torments and death, unless they will blaspheme God, and re-

nounce

nounce their Religion; If it appear to them very *probable*, ſuppoſe a hundred to one, that upon their refuſal, Their Perſecutors will really execute what they threaten: And if on the other ſide it appear very *improbable*, ſuppoſe ten thouſand to one, that they ſhall not be delivered by a Miracle: In ſuch caſes, it is not to be expected that the conſideration of the ordinary courſe of Providence in the diſpenſation of Rewards and Puniſhments, ſhould be ſufficient to reſtrain a man from any kind of Blaſphemy or Villany whatſoever.

But the thing I am ſpeaking to, will more fully appear, by conſideration of thoſe horrid Miſchiefs of all kinds, that would moſt naturally follow from the denial of this Doctrine.

If there be no ſuch thing to be expected as Happineſs or Miſery here-

after, Why then the only buſineſs that men are to take care of, is their preſent well-being in this World; There being nothing to be counted either *Good* or *Bad*, but in order to this. Thoſe things which we conceive to be conducible to it, being the only *duties*; and all other things that are croſs to it, being the only *ſins*. And therefore whatever a man's Appetite ſhall incline him to, he ought not to deny himſelf in it (be the thing what it will) ſo he can have it, or do it without probable danger.

Suppoſe it be matter of *Gain* or *Profit* he is diſpoſed to, if he can cheat or ſteal ſecurely, this will be ſo far from being a *fault*, that it is plainly his *duty*, Becauſe it is a proper means to promote his chief End.

And ſo for other caſes of *Anger*, *Hatred*, *Revenge*, &c. according to this

this Principle, a man must take the first opportunity of satisfying these Passions, by doing any kind of mischief to the persons he is offended with, whether by *false Accusations* and *Perjury*; or (if need be) by *poysoning* or stabbing of them; provided he can do these things so, as to escape the suspition of others, and Humane Penalty.

Now let any man judg, what *Bears*, and *Wolves*, and *Devils*, men would prove to one another, if every thing should be not only *lawful*, but a *duty*, whereby they might gratifie their impetuous Lusts, if they might either perjure themselves, or steal, or murder, as often as they could do it safely, and get any advantage by it.

But these things are so very obvious, and undeniable, that the most prophane Atheistical persons do own

the truth of them. And upon this, they are willing to acknowledg, That *Religion* and the *belief of another life*, is a very politick invention, and needful for the well-governing of the world, and for the keeping men in awe, from the doing any ſecret miſchiefs. Which (by the way) is a conceſſion of no ſmall advantage to the honour of Religion, conſidering that it proceeds from the greateſt profeſſed Enemies to it. Whereby they grant, that it is fit theſe things *ſhould be true*, if they are not; or at leaſt that it is fit, that the generality of men ſhould *believe them to be true.* And though they themſelves *pretend* to believe otherwiſe, yet are they not ſo far out of their wits, as to be willing that thoſe with whom they converſe, their Wives, and Children, and Servants, ſhould be of the ſame opinion with them, Becauſe then they could

have no reaſon to expect any ſafety amongſt them. What ſecurity could any man have of his Eſtate, or Honour, or Life, if ſuch with whom he is moſt familiar and intimate, might think themſelves at liberty to do all the ſecret miſchiefs to them, that they had opportunity to commit?

But there is one thing more, which thoſe, who profeſs to diſ-believe this Principle, ſhould do well to conſider; and that is this, That there is no imaginable reaſon, why (amongſt thoſe that know them) they ſhould pretend to any kind of *Honeſty* or *Conſcience*, becauſe they are wholly deſtitute of all ſuch motives as may be ſufficient to oblige them to any thing of this nature. But according to them, that which is called *Virtue* and *Religion*, muſt be one of the moſt ſilly and uſeleſs things in the world.

As for the Principle of *Honour*, which ſome imagine may ſupply the room of *Conſcience*, This relates only to external Reputation, and the eſteem which we have amongſt others; And therfore can be of no influence to reſtrain men from doing any ſecret miſchief.

From what hath been ſaid, it will follow, That thoſe who have any regard to their own ſafeties, ought to abandon all kind of ſociety with ſuch pernicious perſons, who according to their own Principles, muſt take all opportunities of doing any miſchief to others, which they are able to effect, with any advantage to themſelves.

Now if this be ſo (as I have proved), that the nature of man is ſo framed, as not to be effectually perſwaded and wrought upon, without the conſideration of ſuch a future ſtate. If it be neceſſary to put in everlaſting motives,

tives, as the Sanctions of that Law, by which the Humane Nature is to be governed; This muſt render it highly credible, that there is ſuch a ſtate. Becauſe it muſt needs be very unworthy of God, to conceive of Him, that he hath contrived the nature of one of his beſt and moſt noble Creatures, after ſuch a manner, as to make it incapable of being governed without falſhood and deceit.

3. The third and laſt Argument I propoſed to ſpeak to, was from the neceſſity of this Principle to the *vindication of Divine Providence.* Nothing is more univerſally acknowledged, than that God is *Good* and *Juſt.* That well-doing ſhall be rewarded, and evil Actions puniſhed by Him. And yet we ſee that his diſpenſations in this life are many times promiſcuous and uncertain; ſo that *a man cannot judg of love or hatred*

tred by all that is before him. The worſt men are ſometimes in the beſt condition.

Cor. 15. 19. *If in this life only we had hope, we ſhould be of all men the moſt miſerable*, ſaith the Apoſtle, ſpeaking concerning thoſe primitive times of Perſecution, when the better any man was, the more was he expoſed to ſufferings.

Now the greater *Uncertainty* there is as to the *preſent Affairs* in this world, By ſo much greater is the *Certainty* of a *future Judgment.*

What could be a greater diſparagement to Divine Providence, than to permit the Calamities and Sufferings which good men undergo in this world, many times upon the account of Religion, to paſs *unrewarded*; and the many Miſchiefs and Prophanations, which wicked men take the advantage of committing, by their Greatneſs and Proſperity in this world, to go *unpuniſhed*?

What

What great glory would it be, to preſide over this Material World, *Starrs* and *Meteors*, *Sea* and *Land*, *Plants* and *Beaſts*, to put theſe things into ſuch a regular courſe, as may be ſuitable to their natures, and the operations for which they are deſigned; and in the mean ſpace to have no proportionable regard, either for thoſe that *reverence the Deity*, or thoſe who *contemn Him*?

'Tis very well ſaid to this purpoſe by a late Author, That not to conduct the courſe of *Nature* in a due manner, might ſpeak ſome defect of *Wiſdom* in God: but not to compenſate *Virtue* and *Vice*, beſides the defect of *wiſdom*, in not adjuſting things ſuitably to their qualifications, but croſſly coupling Proſperity with Vice, and Miſery with Virtue, would argue too great a defect of *Goodneſs* and of *Juſtice*. And per- *Amyraldus.*

haps it would not be less expedient (saith he) with *Epicurus*, to deny all Providence, than to ascribe to it such defects. It being less unworthy of the Divine Nature, to neglect the Universe altogether, than to administer Human Affairs with so much Injustice and Irregularity.

And therefore 'tis necessary for the vindication of Divine Providence, that there should be a future state and day of Account, wherein every man shall be forced to acknowledg, that *ve-*
Psal. 58. 11. *rily there is a reward for the righteous; doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth.*

I crave leave for a word of Application, and I have done. If this be so, it will concern us then to enquire,

1. Whether we do in good earnest *believe* this, That there shall be a future state of Reward and Punishment, accor-

according as mens Lives and Actions have been in this world. If not, why do we profeſs our ſelves to be Chriſtians? Why do we not renounce the Articles of our Creed? Nay, why do we pretend to any Religion? Nothing can be more falſe and unworthy, than in a ſolemn and religious manner to own that in our outward Profeſſion, which we do inwardly diſ-believe and deny.

2. Do we at any time ſeriouſly *conſider* this? and revolve upon it in our minds? Do we bethink our ſelves, what our own condition is like to be at that time, what preparations we have made for it, what grounds we have for hope? There cannot poſſibly be any greater ſtupidity, than for a man to be ſlight and careleſs in a buſineſs of ſo great moment. 'Tis the want of believing and conſidering this, that is the chief cauſe of all the viciouſneſs and diſorder in the world.

3. What *impression* doth the belief and consideration of this make *upon our hearts and lives*? Doth it stir up in us, *vehement desires*, and *carefulness of mind* in preparing for that time? If a man were to be tryed for his life at the next Assizes, How would his thoughts be taken up about his defence, what answer he should make, what the main plea is which he should insist upon, by what evidence it might be strengthned and cleared up? He would as soon forget to eat his meat, or to go to bed, as to let a business of this nature slip out of his mind.

There is nothing more hard to be restrained, than the Impetuous and wild Exorbitances of Youth; And yet such persons *would not*, *durst not* indulge themselves, according to *the ways of their own hearts*, and *the sight of their eyes*; If they did really believe and consider,

ſider, that *for all theſe things God would bring them to judgment.* Eccleſ. 11.

The buſineſs of Religion, muſt therefore be above all other things of greateſt conſequence to us, becauſe 'tis the only means to ſecure us, as to our future conditions. The affairs of this life are but of ſhort continuance, and full of uncertainty: And therefore 'tis not much material what a man's condition may be in that reſpect. But there is another ſtate and time which will more nearly concern our care; and that is the great day of Account. And till a man hath in ſome meaſure provided for this, he cannot live comfortably, or ſleep quietly, or have any ſolid peace in his mind; but muſt upon every ſerious reflexion be continually haunted with frightful apprehenſions about his everlaſting condition.

'Tis ſcarce credible that any man ſhould

ſhould be ſo ſottiſh, as to think, he ſhall eſcape dying: and when we do come to depart out of this world, It will then be no advantage to us, that we have had Riches, or Honour, or Power. Theſe things will then vaniſh away, as to our *Poſſeſſion* of them; and the *Remembrance* of them may prove a torment to our thoughts, rather than a comfort; eſpecially if we have reaſon to ſuſpect, that theſe things were our *portion in this life*, and may be reckoned upon as *our good things which we have had already*. Certain it is, that they will render our Accounts the more difficult: For to whom much is given, of them much ſhall be required. We muſt be anſwerable not only for *our doings*, but for *the fruit of* Luk. 17.10. *our doings*. All the ſins, or evil conſequences which have been occaſioned by our Miſcarriages, ſhall be ſet upon our ſcore.

And

And if these things be so, *What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for, and hastning unto the coming of the day of God.* If any thing can prevail with men *to live soberly, righteously, aud godly in this present world*, It must be from the consideration of that *blessed hope and glorious appearing of the Great God, our Saviour Jesus Christ:* To whom with the Father, *&c.*

2 Pet. 3.

Tit. 2. 12

FINIS.